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ABSTRACT

A rationale for restructuring American education through changing the school schedule is presented in this paper. The following issues are addressed: the national status of year-round education; meeting children's needs; school year calendars in Europe, Japan, and Russia; and school calendar options. Arguments for year-round schooling are that it provides continuous learning, reduces teacher burnout, is compatible with the American family lifestyle, and is supported by the business community. The quarter system that was implemented at the high school level in Buena Vista, Virginia, is briefly described. A conclusion is that choice should be based on individual school district needs. (LMI)

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YEAR-ROUND SCHOOLS: A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Educational excellence is a national concern, a state responsibility, and a local issue. America has become a global partner in the international economy. For America to compete in the global economy, the nation's schools will have to raise their educational standards. Raising the educational standards will be necessary to better prepare the work force for competition in the international arena. The schools will have to restructure to be competitive in the technological and informational age. In the 1800's and early 1900's, the agrarian calendar for student attendance was important when over 85% of the people were engaged in agriculture. The city calendars gave way to the agrarian calendar which scheduled schooling for as little as three to six months each year. During World War II the September to June schedule became the accepted calendar in the majority of the school districts throughout America. Today, conditions have changed with less than 3% of the work force engaged in agriculture, the agrarian calendar is out-dated and has out-lived its time.

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Dr. Charles Ballinger, Executive Secretary, National Association for Year-Round Education states that "the present 180-day school calendar with three months vacation does not address the educational needs of today's children." The change of the school calendar is essential to the restructuring of American education. Now, families have mini-vacations, and the research supports continuous learning as the educational model for the children of the 21st Century.

America's children deserve a chance to meet higher educational standards. Restructuring the school calendar can benefit the disadvantaged, gifted, remedial and average students. Restructuring is a paradigm that could make continuous learning for the students in each of the nation's 15,000 school districts a reality.

NATIONAL YEAR-ROUND STATISTICS

In 1991-92, twenty-three states had year-round programs. These states have 204 school districts, 1281 elementary schools, 142 middle/junior high schools, 18 special schools, and 205 high schools, totaling 1646 public schools in year-round education. The private schools have a total of 22 schools operating year-round programs. The 1991-92 grand total was 1668 year-round schools housing 1,349,835 students. The largest number of year-round schools are located in California, Utah, and Nevada. However, Florida, Texas, and Arizona are rapidly growing in the number of

year-round schools.

The number of year-round schools is expected to double in the next two years.

NEEDS OF THE CHILDREN

School reform has been a popular topic in the educational literature during the 20th Century, peaking in popularity after the publication of "A Nation At Risk" in 1983. Many of America's children are "at risk." The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that three out of every five children born today will be living in a single-parent household before they reach the age of eighteen. The problems of the children are further accented by the fact that one of eight children are born with medical problems. Children account for forty percent of the Nation's poor; malnutrition affects nearly a half-million children; families now make up the largest and fastest growing segment of the homeless; about sixty percent of the mothers are in the work force; and twenty-five percent of the children will be on welfare at some point before adulthood.

These problems provide "staggering" challenges for the teachers and school administrators. The educators must address the needs of the children and at the same time prepare each child educationally to enter the work force. To clear the hurdles for the Nation's children, the schools will have to provide programs that are developmental at the elementary level, interdisciplinary at the middle level, and individualized at the high school level.

Early intervention must be provided in the school calendar at the end of each 45 or 60 day module through intersessions for remediation and enrichment.

LENGTH OF SCHOOL YEAR OF OTHER COUNTRIES

Despite the many needs of America's youth, the United States continues to have the shortest school year (180 days) of any other industrialized nation. In most of the European countries the school year is at least 220 days. Japanese children attend school for 240 days each year, and Russian children attend school for 210 days each year.

The primary reason given for not changing the school calendar is that of tradition and a cliche that quality is more important that quantity. I remind you that learning does take time, and for some children learning will require more time than it does for others.

The present agrarian school calendar is designed for "forgetting." A New York State Board of Regents study in 1978 revealed that disadvantaged students learn on average of one year growth of knowledge in the September to June calendar and lose three to four months of learning growth during the summer vacation. It is said by experienced teachers that this learning loss requires teachers to review for most of the first six weeks of each new school year.

The opposition to changing the school calendar to a year-round system of education will gradually dissipate and give way to a program of continuous learning for the children. The long summer vacation is an out-moded system for educating America's children. Former U.S. Education Secretary William Bennett stated that rethinking our vacation plans is "a reasonable price to pay for the promise of more successful lives for our children."

SCHOOL CALENDARS

A variety of school calendars is available to meet the needs of the children in each of America's school districts. Normally, schools select the multi-track schedule to relieve over-crowding while the single-track schedules are implemented to improve the equality of education. The most common schedule is the 45-15 plan. The school year is divided into four nine-week terms, each followed by fifteen days of intersession. The 60-20 plan divides the school year into three sixty-day terms, each followed by twenty days of intersession. The 90-30 plan consists of ninety-day terms, each followed by thirty days of intersession. In 1973-1974, Buena Vista implemented a four-quarter school year at the high school level requiring all students to attend three quarters and allowing the students to attend the fourth or summer quarter on a voluntary basis. The program has been nationally recognized as a model for other school districts according to Charles Ballinger, Executive

Secretary of the National Council for Year-Round Education.

In all of the year-round schedules, the students enjoy the regular holiday periods and attend school during the week days. Vacation schedules are more frequent, and intersessions provide opportunities for remediation and enrichment. The calendars are usually 180 days. The intersessions are from 10 to 15 days each.

OBJECTIVES FOR CHANGING TO A YEAR-ROUND CALENDAR

1. Continuous Learning -- In year-round schools children and teachers are scheduled for blocks of learning time with intersessions at the end of each 45 or 60 day learning cycle. Children scoring below the 25th percentile on standardized tests should be required to attend each intersession. Normally, the remedial activities will be for eight to ten days of each fifteen to twenty-day intersession. The remedial sessions will be scheduled for one-half day.

   Enrichment activities will be voluntary but an integral part of each intersession. Enrichment intersession activities will include but will not be limited to such activities as math, science, history, art, culture and physical education. The enrichment programs will be developed with the assistance of teachers and parents.

2. Teacher Stress and Burn-out -- An increasing problem for the school administrator is teacher stress and burn-out. The problem is becoming more evident in faculties each year. Under the year-round schedule the teachers will continue to sign 180 day teaching contracts with twenty additional days for in-service, planning, and curriculum development. From the testimonials of experienced teachers in year-round programs, teacher stress and burn-out are greatly reduced when the school year is converted to 45 or 60 day modules. The regular teachers leave the school site during each intersession unless they volunteer to teach. If they so desire and volunteer the instructional activity will give each teacher an opportunity to earn additional compensation and enjoy the opportunity for year-round employment.

3. The Twenty-First Century Family -- As is the American custom, many families enjoy vacation time; however, the present agrarian calendar is out-dated for the lifestyles of the families of the 21st Century. The employers cannot grant vacations for periods longer than one or two weeks because of legitimate business concerns. With the revision of the school calendar the families will be able to schedule three or four legitimate vacations without interference with schooling.

A major reason for changing the school calendar is to address the vacation schedules and lifestyles of the parents in the 21st Century.

4. Business and Industry -- Business and industry have a vested interest in the education of America's elementary and secondary school students. Eighty percent of their workers transfer directly from high school to their work sites. The leaders of business and industry have recognized the need for and are aggressively promoting the restructuring of America's public schools. Mr. Lavette Teeter, Vice-President of Harris-Teeter grocery chain, with eleven thousand employees, is aggressively promoting the change of the school calendars. Also, he is a member of a school board that has made the transition to year-round schooling (45-15) with great success and national recognition in Mooresville, North Carolina.

CONCLUSION

Keith Geiger, President of the National Education Association has stated that year-round calendars provide students with "more continuous learning and therefore improved schooling; reduction of class size; intersession for remedial programs; full utilization of facilities; and a chance to take a vacation in a month other than July or August." The choice for change to year-round should be that of each school district based on the educational needs of the local children as well as the community life styles. The National

Governors Association in its report "Time for Results" stated that there is no reason to leave the school buildings vacant for half of the year when the children are in need of additional schooling. The traditional or agrarian calendar has outlived its time and now is the time to change the school calendar to a system of continuous learning and reflect the lifestyles of the parents in the 21st Century.

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